

THE ART AND CRAFT OF LETTERS

HISTORY by R. H. GRETTON

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R. H.
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I

SOME two hundred years ago History was disturbed in its monastic seclusion. Taken into the society of men of a polite culture, it began to display some of their characteristics in a humaner breadth of vision and a more detached reflectiveness. To-day the noise of the market-place is about it, and its world is the world of affairs and business. It has ceased to issue the mandates of orthodoxy; it has ceased to be didactic. It has become the fruit of interaction between the materials of the historian and the ideas of his contemporaries; and its future depends upon the quality of its response to the demands which those ideas make upon it.

Hardly enough emphasis has yet been laid upon the twofold character of the change that produced the modern schools of history. They are as a rule dated from the publication of Wolff's *Prolegomena to Homer*, which has long been regarded as the first complete instance of the modern system of scientific enquiry and comparative criticism. But that work, while

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it signalised a change in the historian's attitude towards his material, such as could not have been produced without reconsideration of the point of view of historical study, yet left unchanged the philosophical conception of history, and the sphere of history in the range of the human intellect. It affected method, but not outlook. Now between a change in method and a change in outlook there is this distinction—that the one may spring wholly from the spirit of scholarship and study, whereas the other must be caused by a different spirit. It is perfectly possible to conceive of an historian, from no other prompting than that given by a scholarly mind confronted with certain age-long versions of the world's past, being moved to put them all to the test, and enquire if there be not other facts to take into account, or discoveries to be made, which would modify tradition. But a man who asks himself what is the point of contact between history and the life of his time—what is the place of history in the human mind—is bringing a different impulse to bear, an impulse not of scholarship, but of life and experience. Of course the historian in all ages has in some sense asked himself what is the purpose of history. But no searching change had passed over the schools when Macaulay's answer to the question could be that history “imposes general truths on

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the mind by a vivid representation of characters and incidents"—an answer echoed even in our own day by Lord Rosebery's view of history as "the treasure-house of human biography, and therefore of noble models and splendid inspiration." Such answers could not possibly be given by any one contemplating the style and aims of history at the present moment. The conclusion he would be more likely to draw would be that the value of historical knowledge lay in its effect upon our response to the problems of our own time, upon our mental vision in general, and our intellectual reaction to every stimulus of information and criticism. In other words, history is for the first time genuinely looking backwards. Formerly the historian planted himself imaginatively at some point in the past, and worked forwards. It was not by an accident that certain people were moved to print the date 4004 B.C. at the opening of the Bible, or 764 B.C. at the beginning of a Roman History. It was essential to their point of view that they should have a definite place at which to set out upon their travels. The modern historian finds that definite place in his own day. He does not transport himself to a past period, and work towards his day. Looking backwards, he singles out the significant features of the past, and it is of less consequence to him than it was to his predecessors to date events. Their vitality is not in themselves, but

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in the spark of fire with which they respond to the search-lights. This change in outlook was later than the change in method to make its appearance ; and its progress is less easy to trace, because it has not been continuous. A change mainly affecting the spirit of scholarship could proceed, once it had begun, by its own momentum. A change in outlook was subject to the ebb and flow of the current of civilised thought, to the checks and advances communicated to it by social and political movements. It is, however, possible to find in the work of Adam Smith the starting-point of a line of development which is just traceable through the work of Buckle and Lecky to a kind of cul-de-sac in John Richard Green's *Short History of the English People*, and to the more active influence of Karl Marx.

The changes have, at any rate, been such as to make it unnecessary, if not impossible, to attempt to trace in detail the progress of historical knowledge. Two famous sayings of the eighteenth century are enough to raise a formidable barrier between the history schools of the present and the historical pursuits of the past. One is Sir Robert Walpole's remark : " Read me anything but history, for that must be false " ; the other is Dr. Johnson's opinion that history was a kind of almanack-making. These sayings have the common ground of re-

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garding history as a mere concatenation of assertions. Walpole implies that it was unrelated to the life of the time ; for historical deductions may at any period, or in any hands, be sound or unsound, but a feeling that history *must* be false can only arise from the conviction that it has no point of contact with the normal lives and normal mind of mankind. Johnson implies that history is assertion unrelated to philosophy or intellectual curiosity. The completeness of the revolution in the history schools may be gauged by the observation that applied to history in the modern sense—history as a theory of life and a formula of the intellect—both these famous remarks become wholly meaningless. This requires no proving in the case of Dr. Johnson's remark. It is true of Walpole's, because to say nowadays that history *must* be false would be the same thing as to say that no single one of the sociological and political philosophies of our time can hold water, and that there is no such thing as scholarship or scientific criticism.

In the forces which brought about the profound change in method and outlook there were elements which go far to explain the position of history to-day. Though the change may be dated by the work of Wolff and Adam Smith, neither the *Prolegomena* nor the *Wealth of Nations* burst upon an alien world. Each book was immediately recognisable ; each, in other

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words, was but the most significant and most accomplished outcome of certain tendencies of thought. These tendencies may be roughly gathered up under the head of Rationalism. The revolt from the authority of the Church was as necessary for history as for all other forms of learning. One of the most lasting and powerful effects of Christianity had been to cut the world off from its past. The gulf that must in any case have been opened by the destruction of the Roman civilisation in Europe was made deep and permanent by the new religion, which caused so fundamental a change that all the effort, the aspirations, and the thought of preceding centuries took on an appearance of futility; and thus fell into an oblivion more profound than any mere passage of time could have produced. Hitherto the past had only been past in a chronological, and not in an imaginative sense. Greek and Roman literature show no consciousness of history as an intellectual pursuit. It might be said, with almost equal truth, either that all classical literature is history, or that none of it is history. The great dramas of Athens are in one aspect as much a writing of history as the books of Thucydides. In another aspect the Annals of Tacitus are as much a work of the imagination as the *Æneid*. The annalist, the dramatist, and even the lyrical poet, worked in a single homogeneous medium. *Œdipus* and

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Pericles were both Athenians; Turnus and Tiberius both Romans. The interest in every case resided less in the deeds or sayings to be chronicled than in the style, the wit, the dramatic power with which they were chronicled. The material was common ground—was conventionalised, in some instances, almost canonised, fact. The distinction between legend and truth did not exist; and history answered entirely to Macaulay's definition of it as "a compound of poetry and philosophy," imposing "general truths on the mind by a vivid representation of characters and incidents."

It was, of course, the essence of Christianity to impose general truths on the mind, and to do it on an extremely narrow basis of fact. The three years of the ministry of Christ, and the three days of his death and resurrection, availed, in the triumph of the new religion, to obliterate all the history, the poetry, and the philosophy of the earlier Western world. Christianity specialised learning and literature, and virtually monopolised the sphere of the imagination. All art became didactic. Consequently, when history struggled back into being, there had arisen a new distinction between the thing said and the way in which it was said—a distinction between instruction and amusement. With the former, deliberate imaginative effort had little or nothing to do; in so far as imagination was used upon

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facts, the result belonged to a new class of literature. Ethical considerations were called into play, and truth and fiction began to dwell in different camps. The Renaissance, while it could not but give a wider sweep of the eye to history, and a more vivid sense of the past, made nevertheless very little difference to history as a branch of learning. Such long-lost historical work as came to light was read as part of the great treasure of classical literature, not as history. For, indeed, the moral criterion remained in force, with the double effect of drawing a line between the ancient and the modern world, and also of substituting for a critical distinction between the true and the false a didactic distinction between the profitable and the unprofitable. Even Erasmus, capable as he was of perceiving the former distinction, falls as often as not into making the latter. In neither respect did the Renaissance bring about any real change. Its brilliant spirits were, indeed, ready to deny that the modern world was any better than the ancient, and to amuse themselves by trying to put back the clock, and live and think as if Christianity had never been. But this was only to dig deeper, not to bridge over, the division between ancient and modern ; it was placing an exaggerated emphasis on the line between the two. Nor did the Reformation, even while it did something to sweep away an old paralysis of judg-

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ment, do much towards the setting up of new standards in history. In so far as history was an exercise of the intellect at all, it remained a mechanical disciplinary exercise ; for philosophy and the theory and practice of living were still one with the teaching of the Church.

How little effect the Reformation really had upon historical learning may be seen in the fact that, when change began at last to appear, it did so in a country and nation which had not given way to the new religious liberty. Neither England nor Germany lacked men who might have been capable of bringing about a change. Leibnitz in 1670, publishing documents in their original form, instead of "correcting" them, and his English disciple Rymer, transcribing and putting into print the State Charters of England, or in lesser degree men like Dugdale, Leland, and Anthony Wood, were acting on some instinctive belief (it can hardly have amounted to an intellectual conviction) that there was such a thing as historical learning. Of its real scope and nature they could discern but little. The formal documents of a kingdom, the lists of the possessions of great monastic institutions, the details of pedigrees and coats-of-arms—these were all expeditions well within the rigid boundaries which formalised Christianity had set to the teaching of history. Here was all the due respect for class distinctions upon which the Church had long de-

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pendent for her material prosperity, and had even come to depend, in some degree, for her very security. However much had been published in this kind, history would never have advanced far. The hierarchical conception of the world governed it; there were strata of society to which no history attached. A kind of preconceived orderliness vitiated these efforts at research in the countries that had been the main theatres of the Protestant liberation of the mind; and it may well have been that the very qualities which had made them fruitful ground for Protestantism kept them at the same time too prim, too serious, for the full reach of mental emancipation. One of the reasons why the two great Protestant nations could protest with power and effect against the Roman Church's exaltation of authority was that they had within themselves, in a pre-eminent degree, the respectful incuriosity of spirit which can co-exist with even fundamental speculations of the intellect. Locke and Butler had no help to give to Rymer and Dugdale; and thus history, while it began to make more certain of the deeds and purposes of kings and great ones, remained convinced that these were the matters of chief importance.

The great change had to come from another direction, and from a nation which had not sufficient gravity to be uneasy under the power-

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ful command of the Roman Church, but had always had too lively a wit to regard seriously any human limitations to spiritual curiosity. France was capable both of an extreme expression of the position of official Christianity, and of the most violent solvent of that position. The two had to coincide in order to produce a fresh substance in the shape of a new conception of history ; Bossuet and Voltaire brought about the coinciding. The *Histoire Universelle* was the crowning utterance of history under the permit of the Church. It made the whole record of the human race turn upon the birth of Christ and the theory of Divine concern for the world which was implicit in that event. The effect of this book upon Voltaire brought about the first notable manifestation of the Rationalist spirit. As is always the case in great advances of the mind of man, the truth of what had happened was a long time in penetrating to the consciousness of the world. For nearly a hundred years to come the two influences worked in parallel lines, each aware of the other, each mistrustful of the other, and each unconscious of the profound effects which the hated neighbour was having upon itself. The schools of history were more and more galvanised into something approaching real life. This was first visible in France, where the influence of what had happened would naturally be strongest. Ducange's *Glossary*, Mont-

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faucon's *Palæographia Græca*, and the whole work of the Benedictine school in Paris marked an immense advance, none the less immense because it was made rather blindly. The provocation which history was beginning to receive from the philosophers was a stimulus; the philosophers were unfortunately not good enough historians to make their influence a guidance. So the stimulus acted without direction; the history schools received the goad, and shot forward upon their own line. The Rationalists, accompanying their progress, challenged their system and their outlook, without having the qualities of mind that could use their investigations and discoveries to better purpose.

But once the way had been opened, the two nations that had the capacity for all but the supreme blasting of the walls moved in their own time through the breach which had been made. The work of French thinkers cannot be used to date the change in historical method and outlook, because, though they had produced the new thing by bringing together the extreme agents of change, they remained, by dint of this gift for extremes, in two separate lines of action. The researchers could become good researchers within their limitations; the philosophers could be nothing but witty and subversive generalisers. It was left for Germany to produce the researcher without limitations, and for England to produce

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the generaliser capable of subduing himself to facts. Wolff's *Prolegomena* had all the intensive scholarship that had grown up in the Benedictine school, without any of the prejudices, however unconscious, of the Church's influence. He approached his subject, not with the sentimental enthusiasm of the Renaissance for classical antiquity, nor with the chilly remoteness of ecclesiastical scholars from a heathen time; but purely as an intellectual human being. His work was the revelation to orthodox historians of the great distance they had travelled, without quite knowing what they were doing, during the eighteenth century. Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, on the other hand, was a revelation to the Rationalists. Not only had the powerful control of the Church gone, not only had history ceased to revolve exclusively round the facts of Christianity, but the whole hierarchical conception of history had gone too. The king and the noble had been undermined with the priest, and came crashing down before a new philosophy of history, which made their wars and bickerings, their charters and treaties, little more than the foam or flotsam on the currents and eddies of a life of nations turning upon common human needs, the natural advantages or disadvantages of a country's position on the globe, middle-class commerce, and industrial labour. Wars and treaties might sometimes be the visible outcome

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of the conflict of these influences, or might be obstacles interrupting for a time the flow of the current. But the current itself might be, and generally was, something separable from these things.

The word "history" has a double meaning ; it signifies the course of human events, as well as the record of that course. A great period in the one sense has seldom had much direct effect upon history in the other sense. But it happened that, just about the time of the publication of Wolff's and Adam Smith's works the course of events in Europe was such as to enlarge immensely the recognition of the new historical methods. The French Revolution made history in both senses of the word. As Lord Acton has remarked, a Liberal school which set out to justify the Revolution as the ripened fruit of all history was inevitably bound to be at some pains to say what history was, and could not possibly be content with any of the old answers. By its very premisses this school of thought was committed to a view of history in which kings and nobles and priests no longer covered the whole ground. With David Hume the theories of Adam Smith began to make their way into the heart of English politics ; and his name must stand for the making of a great fresh breach by Rationalism.

Now about these radical changes of the

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eighteenth century in the conception of history there is this to be noted—that already they foreshadowed an interaction between history and every other branch of human knowledge, every other branch, one might even say, of exercise of the human intelligence, whether practical or speculative. Religion, philosophy, science (in the cases of Leibnitz and Pascal), and lastly politics, had felt the change, and had both modified it in their several directions and been modified by it. But again, as after the vivifying impact of Bossuet upon Voltaire, some time was to elapse before the full realisation of the change. To the world at large history remained still a matter of annals; a man so near to the present day as Professor Freeman could define history, with almost incredible jejuneness of outlook, as “past politics.” The Liberal school failed in their interpretation to England of the French Revolution. Pitt and the Napoleonic wars intervened; and English thought for the most part swung away from the new ideas. Conceptions of history and philosophy that related themselves to the guillotine affronted the nation of respectables; and, in spite of Chartist agitations following the Reform Bill campaign, England blandly stepped backwards intellectually.

But the light which had broken upon historical study was far too strong to be lost, even in a period of general reaction. Both the change of

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spirit produced by the Rationalist school, and the change of method produced by the new respect for authorities, had occurred long before the Revolution, and could not be obliterated. In effect the worst of the Revolution, from the point of view of historical learning, was that it delayed what it seemed at first to be hastening—the interpretation of history in new terms of the actual, visible, present life of nationalities. In other words, what was lost again for a time was the connection which had been caught sight of between history and the common daily politics of a nation. This is no more than to repeat, in terms of a particular subject, the general truth of the situation in England during the first half of the nineteenth century. The masses of the people, desecrated, during a brief and appalling period, by the flaming light from France, proved, when that fire began to die down, to have lit no bonfires of their own sufficient to keep them in view. The middle classes, cannily riding the crest of the wave of industrial change, interposed their solid forms between the populace and the intellectuals. History, therefore, which had for one moment stepped clean out of academic abodes, abandoned its adventure.

Nevertheless it is true that historians did not return wholly to the seclusion of the library. Such work as Hallam's *Constitutional History*, while thoroughly orthodox in most aspects, was

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not devoid of indications that the scholars had snuffed a freer air. It is significant that Hallam deliberately stopped his work when it reached the accession of George III. Now, if we had never known this fact—if the book had merely ended where it does—the significance would have been less marked. But since Hallam is known to have held his hand at this point with regret, it is clear that he did, however dimly, conceive of a possibility that history might actually deal with almost contemporary events. Its controversies, that is to say, might be not merely the distant exchange of shots between dons interpreting documents, but the brisk bitter cut and thrust of political temper. Hallam decided, indeed, that this could not be allowed to happen; but that his mind could be even in the state to render such a decision necessary is the important fact. It means, for one thing, that Carlyle was not so singular, so solitary in his outlook—so little, some would say, of a true historian—as he has been supposed to be. Through the lurid smokiness of *The French Revolution*, and the restlessness of *Past and Present*, there is always audible the cry, “This is what your history must be called to account for—this vast mass unknown to your bland records of kings and nobles; and you must stand here, on the spot, in view of it and keeping it in view, if history is to have any vital meaning.” What Hallam just allowed himself

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to look at, though only in the end to refuse it, was precisely this standing on the spot. Though in so different a spirit from that of Carlyle, he too felt that the real motive force in historical work was this intractable element of the recent, and even the contemporary.

Curiously enough, the same thing is true of that historian whom modern criticism is apt to regard as little but a hindrance to historical learning. Macaulay's position as a historian has been judged too much on one issue. His expressed aim to make history "true romance" has condemned him. Writing, as he did, in an age when the new method of scientific investigation of facts, criticism of authorities, and respect for documents was fairly in command of the field of serious historical work, his deliberate reliance upon imaginative power has to later eyes the air of an almost besotted conceit. His intention to make the notable personages, the effective moments of the stock histories, live and breathe again, in preference to reconsidering the point of view of those stock histories, was a crime against scholarship ; and it may well now be vain to attempt to defend him. But there is room at least for extenuating circumstances. It is to Macaulay's credit that he was not far from Hallam or Carlyle in his conception of the standpoint of history. The motive force in his work is concern for the existing state of affairs, and an

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interest in the conditions which produced it. The concern, indeed, is different from Carlyle's ; it is wholly a middle-class concern, aroused by the political sufferings of Whiggism, and not by the sheer physical sufferings of the mass of the people. The interest, again, is of a different quality from Hallam's ; it is not the scholar's interest in constitutional development, but the politician's interest in party struggles. Still, Macaulay writes with his foot firmly planted in his own day ; he reaches no further back than he can go without lifting that foot. In a word, he has at any rate conceived of history as more than annals. His critics, while admitting that, have thought too easily that his cure for the annalistic outlook was solely the romantic imagination. In truth, it was the same cure as better historians than he, both at his own time and since, found and applied—the pivoting of history upon the affairs and the immediate political interests of their contemporaries. Macaulay's own remark that his ambition was to make his *History* replace the latest novel of the day upon the tables of young ladies has often been turned against him by the purists in history. It was not so far out of accord with the developing purpose of history schools.

The objection that he is content to use again the stock personages and scenes, without reconsidering the question of their real im-

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portance to national life, is one arising wholly from the modern point of view. It ignores the fact that the most brilliant and scholarly of the new historians, who are set in contrast with Macaulay, had in this respect no more original ideas than he had. Ranke is one of the idols of the modern school. Lord Acton, whose master he was, sums up the two ideals of modern historians in two sentences about him—the first, “He was the real originator of the heroic study of records”; and the second, “He taught us to be critical, to be colourless, to be new.” Yet it never occurred to Ranke that the subject-matter of history was other than the intrigues of rulers, the ambitions of nobles and priests, the factions of statesmen and parliaments. However new a vigour he may have brought to investigation and comparative criticism, the range of history remained for him within the old limits.

The truth is that throughout the first half of the nineteenth century the position of history in England and Germany was not unlike what it had been during the eighteenth century in France. Two different currents were at work, and were not fully conscious of their relation to one another. But whereas in France the final contact of the masters of method and the masters of outlook was to leave its permanent effect upon method, the result, so long delayed, in England and Germany was to be more marked

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in outlook. The parallel influences were, of course, not quite the same. The Rationalist philosophy had done its work ; in England, at any rate, the barriers of religious prejudice fell right and left during the early part of the nineteenth century ; and it was inconceivable that history should ever again move in doctrinal fetters. Therefore the influence working side by side with the pure historian has to be sought elsewhere. It was the influence of political and social reform. The work that Voltaire, Leibnitz, Descartes, and David Hume had done in the eighteenth century was being done in the nineteenth by Carlyle, Mill, Bright, Lassalle, Karl Marx—the Radicals and the Social Democrats. Philosophers had liberated historical research ; politicians were now to alter its centre of gravity. Having first ceased to be moral, it had become respectable ; it was now to see that even this quality was a limitation.

However, so vast a field had been opened to historians by the change in method that the change in outlook was delayed. Most of the energy of the nineteenth century went in exploring this field. A few scattered publications of original documents had for some time stood alone. But about the year 1800 more attention began to be devoted to the masses of archives possessed by European nations. The result of the attention was not the same in all cases. Con-

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tinental scholars were for the most part content to study the documents, make use of them for their own purposes, and leave them for others to find for other purposes. English historians gave themselves largely to the classification and publication of the State records. Nothing gives so strong an impression of the genuine force which at this time was moving historical work as the fact that the extravagance and waste which accompanied the first twenty years of official publication of records could not bring the enterprise to ruin. So real and vital was the undertaking that the corruption which crept in could be expelled. The consequence was that in England this form of publication has gone much further than in any other civilised country. But the consequence also was that in England the history schools were so much occupied with this work that they were impervious to other influences. The annalistic seemed again to be recovering its grip ; and that freshness of spirit, to which England had actually led the way with Adam Smith's speculations, she allowed to desert her. Nor was this the case in England alone. On the Continent the recourse to documents, though it issued in less direct publication of State Papers, absorbed the historians. Niebuhr, discovering new texts of the classics, and clearing away from the early history of the Roman Republic the baffling conflict of personalities, to leave institu-

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tions and tendencies standing out clear ; Mommsen, turning from his great revaluation of the heroes of Rome to give the world his massive *Corpus Inscriptionum* ; Guizot, publishing between 1822 and 1830 some fifty-seven volumes of historical sources concerning England and France—these were the historical giants of the time. Nor had America, when she came to make her contribution, any new conception of history to offer. Prescott's *History of Ferdinand and Isabella* and his *Conquest of Mexico* and *Conquest of Peru* are all cast in the regulation mould of "heroic study of records," without any questioning whether the matters recorded were the only true and essential substance of history. There was, indeed, so much to do that searching questions of this sort, even if they had occurred to the great historians of the time, could hardly have been faced. While the investigation of written and printed documents was steadily bringing more and more material into view, archæology slowly began to add material of other kinds. Excavation brought upon the historians of ancient periods a flood of new facts that were soon as disturbing, if not as numerous, as the new facts of later centuries. Even such recent reconstructions as the work of Niebuhr and Mommsen showed faulty.

Inherent in nearly all the historical work of the nineteenth century was a zest beyond the mere

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excitement of discovering and using new sources, which helped to keep history in the old tracks. The reconsideration of historical judgments and the re-estimation of historical characters gave a fictitious impression of novel outlook and novel approach to research. There appeared to be fresh life in work that undermined the long accepted view of Pompey's character, that modified the popular condemnation of Titus Oates, or challenged bitterly the popular kindness for Henry VIII. All that was being done was, in effect, no more than a shuffling of the old cards, a moving of the old pieces on the board to a slightly different angle. The annalistic method of history was perhaps made more interesting and certainly more readable by these excursions ; but annalistic it remained.

Moreover, a natural tendency towards a specialisation of function in history—an increasing expertness being demanded by the intensive cultivation of authorities—postponed that conjunction which might, at so much earlier a date than was actually the case, have saved political economy from a certain futile isolation. Karl Marx, indeed, saved himself by the clearness of his own conceptions of the task of political economy. But men like Bagehot and Thorold Rogers in England never thoroughly understood that in their work was preserved that germ of a new theory of the duty of history which had

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first seen the light in *The Wealth of Nations*. Working beside them Stubbs published his *Charters*, Freeman and Froude and Gardiner worked over and over the State records of comparatively short periods ; and it never occurred to either group of scholars that contact between them might be illuminating and vitalising—that the political economist could forge a link between the historian and his own generation which would ensure an interest wider and more lasting than that of the pure scholar.

Yet two books stand out from the rest of the work of this period, as showing already the shifting of the centre of gravity. One was Buckle's *History of Civilisation*, in which the grand march of events, the procession of " noble models and splendid inspiration " had little part. Buckle, in fact, had his work come to its full maturity, might have been as disturbing a sceptic as Voltaire. Some of his fundamental positions were deliberate attacks upon academic history. In his view very little had yet been done towards founding a science of history which should reveal the principles that govern the destiny and character of nations ; in other words, history had as yet been a history of individuals, not of nations at all. In the natural surroundings of a people, its conditions of soil and climate, its command—or lack of command—of the necessities and luxuries of life, he would have traced the mould-

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ing influence of its career, not in the doings of rulers and priests, who could, after all, be regarded as examples of the moulding rather than as themselves moulders. This led him to the further position, that individual effort was comparatively insignificant in the history of a country; great men there were, but on the whole they were rather disturbing influences than leaders of development, the creatures more often than the creators of the times they lived in. In their turn, forces like religion, literature, and civilised government succumbed to the new standards, and became the products, not the causes, of human advancement.

Unfortunately, as in the case of most of the eighteenth-century philosophers, this new genius for generalisation and this new scepticism were hampered by deficiencies in historical learning and scholarship. Buckle was apt to be loose in expression, and rash in the sweep of his statements. But his work coincided with the startling new orientation of science caused by the publication of *The Origin of Species*; and though historians for the most part held on their way, there was a new trend in their minds after Buckle's challenge to them, enforced by the stimulus of the new departure in scientific theory. Froude has had no successor in his defiant following of Macaulay.

The other challenge to academic historians

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failed of its full effect, not from any lack of patient scholarship or any hot-headedness of statement, but simply from its exaggerated presentation of a new spirit. John Richard Green's *Short History of the English People* forced the pendulum over too violently. To maintain that history which was content with the stock material of kings and nobles, parliaments and wars, was unsound and false, did not imply, as Green made it imply, that in the veracious history there would be practically no word of these. It might be true that the real life of the nation moved on beneath the surface which carried aloft the banners and the pageantry of what had hitherto been history, that the trumpets and the clangour sounded but faintly in the little English towns and the villages of the country-side, and that the rise and fall of kings could not interrupt the ploughing and the spinning and the weaving or check the glow of the smithy fires. But, at the same time, the people, thus regarded, became a curiously detached and lifeless body, subject to imperfectly explained shocks from the outside, and now profiting, now suffering loss, from contacts far too vaguely identified. It almost appeared a body with a nervous system, but without the organic implements of a nervous system. For several hundreds of years the people had only seen or handled anything, in a national sense, travelled or gained experience, by means of those

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members which Green omitted so scrupulously from his purview.

Though it therefore failed of its full effect, his *Short History* remains for us the first deliberate exercise in the new historical outlook. It is, in relation to history, the climax of that period of our political existence which saw the breakdown first of aristocratic exclusiveness and then of middle-class individualism, and brought the machinery of government and the organisation of the State to bear directly upon the conditions of the artisan and labourer. Indeed, its main defect may be partly due to the pacific character which that highly ethical period maintained in domestic politics. There was none of the stuff of revolution in the activities of Bright and Gladstone, or in the educative Radicalism of Maurice and Kingsley. That age would naturally tend to avoid recording controversially its protest against the monstrous indifference of kings and nobles or the acquisitive instincts of ecclesiastics. To believe that the life of the nation really went on independent of these disturbers of its surface might seem at the time an advanced theory. But to write a book in that sense was a shirking of the issue, very characteristic of the time. If it was true that all that had hitherto been the material of history was of small concern in the development of the nation, if charters and treaties, wars, parliaments, and con-

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vocations were only of importance to the people in so far as they could be stirred up to pay for them in blood and money, then there was an account to settle, which Green's seemingly drastic revision merely burked.

II

TOWARDS the close of the nineteenth century an extraordinary modification took place in nearly all forms of intellectual activity in England. It was to be observed first, perhaps, in philosophy. An increasing sense of moral muddle and thoughtlessness in the constitution especially of the industrial world made our moral philosophy more and more tentative in its conclusions and more and more averse from emphatic judgments. In matters of religion the heat suddenly died out of those controversies about verbal inspiration and historical origins which had risen stormily in the wake of *The Origin of Species*; they retained an intellectual interest, but they lost their spiritual urgency in face of the new pragmatism impulse to reach out for every stimulus of the moral self in man. The strength and pressure of faith became of more importance than its response to reason. This, while partly due to the fresh influences in philosophy, was also partly caused by a curious clouding of the complacency of natural science. When the fading of the early enthusiasm allowed the Darwinian hypothesis to be seen as the hypothesis which was all that Darwin had ad-

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vanced, and not as the systematic assertion into which it had been transmuted, Science began, amid the queer mixture of good and evil in social and industrial conditions, to modify the neat and decisive formulas of her teleology. Still more remarkably, she submitted to that moral and ethical tinge which she had so strenuously disclaimed ; her dogmas of instinctive response to surroundings and survival of the fittest she no longer laid down without further responsibility as to possible amelioration of the surroundings and strengthening of the unfit.

The truth is, of course, that every branch of learning was feeling the effects of those great mechanical achievements of the nineteenth century which brought, so to speak, the whole world into communication. What geographical discovery, the new ease of travel, the perfection of instruments of research, and so on, did for the advancement of learning is obvious enough. But there was a more subtle quickening of communication proceeding at the same time. Cheap printing, cheap newspapers, and the spread of education made different portions of civilised communities conscious of one another in a way that had hitherto been unknown. Developments little remarked at the moment, such as the increase of the limited liability company in business affairs, profoundly altered the social structure, creating fresh links of consciousness

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between classes hitherto but remotely, even if hostilely, aware of one another.

It was in this general modification of thought that history underwent that change of outlook which, though so much more difficult to trace than the change in method, must have, for all who consider the subject, no less reality. Upon the proper understanding of the change would seem to depend the whole future of history, if history is to be anything more than an intellectual pursuit—if it is to remain a vital influence in affairs. It stood, in the latter years of the nineteenth century, so well equipped, so admirably served, that an age in love with science, and exacting in its requirements of science, did not hesitate to bring history under that title. Not only did accuracy and impartiality become the veriest commonplaces of the historian's work amid the wealth of original sources; he had also all the true scientist's openness of mind as to what constituted facts. Geography, ethnology, and physics are as much the material of the modern historian as documentary or archæological evidences. Comparatively recent delimitations of epochs, comparatively recent conceptions of human progress, have gone by the board with far less difficulty than once attended the abandonment of the date 4004 B.C. for the Creation of the World. Yet in history, more than in any other branch of

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intellectual activity, the new openness of mind was to show as a certain paralysis of decision. The zest in the use of original authorities did not, indeed, fail to keep life flowing in the veins of a purely academic school of history. But during the last twenty years of the nineteenth century the *writing* of history almost ceased. To the first outburst of energy aroused by the discovery of the work to be done in consulting authorities had succeeded a phase no less absorbing to the minds of professional historians, but distinctly a check upon their output. This was the phase of comparative valuation of authorities. It was an almost necessary sequel to the attitude which had been adopted towards Macaulay and Froude. Each of these historians had in his degree (Froude far more than Macaulay) worked from original documents; it was not possible to dismiss their work solely because of its deliberate use of the imagination, since for all, or most of, their serious statements due reference could be given to documentary evidence. It followed that there must be distinction between evidences in point of value; and to this study historians began to devote themselves. In every direction of the field of historical learning the same influence was operating. Niebuhr, Mommsen, Thirlwall, Freeman, and others of the early and middle nineteenth century had written Roman and Greek history in

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the light of that which, in their sphere, largely took the place of the discovery of State papers in modern history—namely, the fruits of excavation. But in this region, too, as the century drew to its close, authority began to be questioned, where previously it had only been employed more or less as it stood. Going deeper and travelling more widely, the excavators produced so many fresh facts that scholars began to suffer the same check as historians. Learned research seemed to be approaching a stalemate of suspended judgment. The only safe thing to do was to publish documents, and avoid writing the history that depended on them.

There was one historian in England at the time great enough to confront the danger—Lord Acton. Himself an unrivalled master of authorities, and unrivalled in his power of estimating and valuing evidence, he attempted to rouse the history schools by pointing out that, while we were still at the beginning of the documentary age, they had some ground to stand upon in “the growing predominance of opinion over belief, and of knowledge over opinion.” He translated his own confidence into action, and set on foot a history monumental enough to make up for the years of sterility—the Cambridge Modern History.

The secret of his confidence amid the general

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indisposition to positive statement may have been partly, besides his own extraordinary gifts, the drawing in his mind of a distinction between the duty of historians as investigators and their duty as instructors. Knowing, as hardly any one else could have known, the utterly overwhelming extent of original documents—for, after all, there was scarcely a question in the history of any European country upon which an historian, after consulting the archives of his own nation, would not have to search those of at least one other nation—he boldly asserted that the region of sources and authorities must be for the historian alone, and that the pupil, the general reader, the politician, must not expect to have anything to do with it. Impartiality might now be taken for granted; there was not an historian who did not hold out to himself the ideals of Ranke—the colourless exactness, the unswerving criticism of authority, the suppression of every minute flavour of individual opinion. This being so, the publication of original documents was a misuse of energy. History should be by this time in a position to publish a clear narrative, unencumbered even with footnote references to sources.

This was a remarkable profession of belief in “the last word.” It had been countered before it was made, not only by almost every tendency of speculation and research in England, but also

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by an altered spirit in education, and by the set of the currents in the body politic.

At the close of the nineteenth century a generation was in existence which had wholly grown up under the sway of two powerful modifications of English national life—one, the cheapening of newspapers, and the other, compulsory education. To these had been added the University Extension movement, and a great advance in the energy, the capacity, and the effectiveness of the newer provincial Universities. The result was that historians found themselves confronted—rather suddenly, since all these influences seemed to come to a head at once—with a new demand, new not only in respect of the persons who made it, but new itself in kind. A demand it was, in the strict sense of the word. Education had for so long been the sign of class distinctions that, when those to whom it had hitherto been out of reach began to find their way into it, they suspected that it was actually an instrument for creating and maintaining class distinctions. Throughout the nineteenth century the movement for popular education had been very largely a political cry, and a class cry. It had been one of the tenets of Chartism ; it had come at last as one of the earliest responses of a Liberal Government to the democratic vote set up by the Reform of 1867. It had been advanced its

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final stage by a Parliament elected after the further Reform of 1884. The natural result was that, when a generation arose capable of building upon the mere substructure of elementary education, it approached its teachers in an aggressively acquisitive spirit. It was there not simply to be taught, but to know what it was being taught. Acton's division of the labours of history would have produced a kind of Sacred College of historical pundits, issuing absolute decrees on grounds of decision of which the world at large would only be permitted to catch sight in the most vague and general way. The new generation would not take its decisions from any lips of authority. The door opened by the study of original documents was not to be closed thus. Demand was made for the authorities themselves, untouched by passage through "middle-class" minds.

This is, perhaps, putting too pugnaciously the attitude of the new-comers to the history schools. If the truth was less sharply cut than this—if less has been heard of such an attitude than seems to be implied by what has been said here—the reason was partly that historians themselves had shrunk from Acton's Encyclical. One of the sentences already quoted from him was enough to give pause to any researcher in the early twentieth century, the sentence about "the growing predominance of opinion over belief,

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and of knowledge over opinion." Vastly as knowledge had advanced, if there was one thing more marked than another in the intellectual principles of this time, it was a respect for opinion which made extremely difficult the mental transition from knowledge to point-blank statement. The more that was known, the less the tendency to assert. So the new-comers, eager and iconoclastic in their invasion of the seats of learning, found that assertions were not pressed upon them. Tutors and professors could hardly be said to lecture any more. They brought with them the keys to the treasure-house of authorities, and entered with their pupils. Seminars were the ideal. Discussion raged, assertion was silent.

It remained, however, to be discovered (and the discovery has not even yet been fully acknowledged) that the demand being made upon history schools was new in kind, as well as in respect of the people who made it. It had in the old days been possible—though it had always been bad for historical work—to draw a line at a certain point, describing everything on the near side of it as contemporary events which were not yet history. Roughly speaking, just as Hallam checked himself at the accession of George III, so throughout the nineteenth century the orthodox historian checked himself at the accession of Queen Victoria. National life and the

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relation of classes to one another were for a long time such that the falseness of this distinction was not apparent. Education was limited ; class separations were very clear and rigid. However deeply the sense of established order might be sapped among historians by the Rationalism of the eighteenth century, it remained valid in practical life. English society before the Reform Bill, whatever might have been its internal difficulties and dissensions, had a shape and an order that were unquestioned. The mass of the people had no inclination to formulate tendencies of the time, to demand a vision of what was going on in their own lives, because for the most part they had no consciousness of organic development ; and no tendencies existed in any effective degree until they were formulated by the minority of educated people. Modern England has real needs, which have largely arisen from those two influences to which reference has been made already, the newspaper press and free compulsory education. The people of to-day cannot help knowing what is going on ; and they can reveal tendencies and interests through channels which did not exist a hundred years ago. They have, in short, every possible opportunity and all the material for befogging themselves and their rulers, for reducing their affairs to inextricable knots, and for blundering about inside a net of unrelated

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happenings. The demand of the new generation practically comes to this—can historical knowledge systematise the conceptions of contemporary existence, formulate its tendencies, give shape and purpose to its discordant interests?

In so far as the demand has been recognised at all, it has been met in various ways. There has been the inevitable reply of the academic conservative. He takes his stand upon the Dignity of History, and proclaims, first, that her decrees are too solemn to be pronounced otherwise than in the passionlessness of lapsed time, or on anything less than the whole of available evidence; and secondly, that to ask of her to cast her eye upon contemporary events is to attempt to degrade her into a political weapon, and deprive her of her pontifical finality. Be it noted, to begin with, that such a position as this is full of illusions. The famous passionlessness of history is not really one of lapsed time, but one of begged questions. The only value of the lapse of time is to prevent detection of the begging of the questions. By placing a buffer period between the times he wrote of and the times he lived in, the academic historian was able to set out the pieces on his board with no more than the most superficial reference to their actual importance to the conditions of his day. Obviously he could then be passionless,

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since he had guarded himself against any connection of his subject with matters that could rouse passion—matters of vital concern to the living. Again, “the whole of the available evidence” is an insincere phrase. The academic historian waits until time has destroyed the baffling cross-lights of life, taken the heat out of loves and hatreds, obliterated the intangible suspicions, the equally intangible confidence and trust, which make up so much of the real moving forces of any given time while its people are alive in it. He waits until nothing is left of a period but its concrete documents, and so lets time beg other questions for him. Nor is the niceness that would lament the use of history as a political weapon much less of an illusion. The teaching of history has always carried political implications; but so long as the classes of the community to which it was taught remained the same as those from which the teachers were drawn, the political trend was less apparent. Only when other classes came for knowledge did the political prejudice—not, indeed, an active and violent prejudice, but an effective, if unconscious, limitation of vision—show itself for what it was. It might even be said, without any intention of perverse paradox, that nothing in the use of history has been more political than this particular kind of refusal to allow it to become a political weapon. For it implies that

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knowledge and investigation must always presume an established order of things, that it can have nothing to do with the processes of change and upheaval. It may at different times be on different sides, according to what is at the moment the established order ; which the admirable lapse of time permits it to perceive. But its loftiest ideal is to be on no side at all, and this is a frame of mind middle-class to the core.

Deplorable as these illusions are, the academic theory of the Dignity of History has a far more fundamental weakness. It denies in effect the reality of the changed spirit that has influenced every other form of intellectual activity. The tentative character of modern philosophy, the ethical outlook of modern science—what do they mean, if not that the only true vitality of learning and education must reside in a perpetually fresh, even, if you will, a perpetually raw, point of contact with the currents, however various, however ill-directed or undirected, of the national life ? To build frankly for a time, to write in the full consciousness that what is written must soon be rewritten, to offer hypotheses, to work without any intention of reaching a decisive pronouncement—these are the characteristics of learned work to-day, and it is difficult to see why history alone should shrink from them. She would, of course, have to con-

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form to them all in order to approach contemporary events. There must be material not available till the generation immediately concerned has passed away ; and many events have no distinguishable importance until the tendencies and movements to which they gave rise have had time to reveal themselves. But these obvious considerations do not alter the fact that there is in modern life an ample mass of material upon which to base hypotheses, from which to conjecture the nature of tendencies and the development of the national character and temper.

It is not, however, necessary, in order to meet the modern demand, that there should be much actual writing of recent and contemporary history. Another kind of response has been made (probably without deliberate intention) by some of the most notable of the historians of our day. There is no indication in the work, for instance, of Maitland and Vinogradoff that they have been actuated by anything but the purest motives of historical research. Yet it would not be fanciful to attribute the unusual interest in their work to the fact that it was, however indirectly, related to political questions and to modern reconsiderations of the social structure. It had a certain imaginative grasp which the work of many of their fellow-historians has lacked.

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Here we are in sight of the root of the whole matter. It is a truism to say that imagination is the vitalising element in the writing or the teaching of history. But the truism is too often delivered without recognition of the several ways in which the imagination can operate. It may operate, and hitherto usually has operated, from the mind of the historian upon that of the community. The future of historical learning would seem now to be bound up in a due understanding of an imagination that has begun to operate in the community at large, and from the mind of the community upon the historian.

The earliest of European literature is full of an imagination of the past which displays a complete lack of any sense of a gulf between past and present. Imagination then did not invent stories ; it only put into the heritage of the past the life of the present. Hence its history moves with entire ease from Prometheus to Pericles, from Æneas to Augustus. Thucydides or Tacitus would have been amazed if any one had asked them if they considered Alcibiades or Sejanus to be historical characters ; yet no historian of to-day who might attempt to write of contemporary personages could avoid facing the question. The imagination of that early time had its roots in contemporary conditions ; and it was only after many centuries, and by a different route, to travel back to the same point.

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Here again the effect of the coming of Christianity was severe upon history. Limiting the significant past, as it did for so long, to a small period in the history of the Jews and to so much of subsequent European history as had been fundamentally modified by the events of that period, it broke the sense of continuity ; and by drawing an immense moral distinction between the ages before and the centuries after that period, it virtually forbade any real exercise of the imagination upon the past. Even when, with the slow increase of knowledge, and the sudden illumination of the Renaissance, that past began to revive, the Church still kept its hold ; it had created, by the mere invention of the phrase *Anno Salutis*, the most indestructible instrument for giving a bias to the intellect that the world has ever seen. Certain definite areas of time were now marked off as "history" ; and since to them the authority of the Church attached, it befell imagination, when that quality could no longer be confined to the service of the Church, to become more or less of a vagabond. There was always a suggestion of falsity in the word. It might be that efforts of the imagination (as, for instance, in the legendary portions of monastic chronicles) were made for proper ecclesiastical purposes ; and in these cases a kind of licence was allowed to the vagabond. But that any real truth, any essential realisation

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of fact, could be reached by way of the imagination, was inconceivable.

Little effect though the Reformation had immediately upon historical learning, it did in some degree open the door of the past to imagination again, not only by the removal of the overshadowing authority of the Church, but even more perhaps by the impetus it gave to national feeling. A people driven by force of circumstances to take an absorbing interest and pride in its own national existence was capable (as the Florence of the Medici had shown) of living with a genuine vitality in the past from which it had sprung. The epoch of Elizabeth could produce historical drama because it had lost for the moment, in the greatness of the events among which it moved, any false partition of the things that were history from its own doings. The result, of course, was not history. Knowledge had advanced in one respect too far, and in the chief respect not far enough. The distinction between fact and legend was established; the question of what was fact had not arisen. So the contact between imagination and the sense of national existence poured its resulting current into a form of imaginative art; the drama, though it lost its historical trend, remained for a hundred years the most vigorous form of art in England.

It was a contact of much the same kind

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which stimulated Macaulay—probably, indeed, stimulated all the historians who were so active in the early part of the nineteenth century. After all the disturbances and perils of the Napoleonic wars, the sense of national existence had everywhere become acute. England especially had become deeply interested in herself. It was a more turbid interest than that of the age of Elizabeth. Industrial slavery, Chartism, and the Corn Law agitation were enough to prevent any overweening pride in national conditions. But they were the indications of a powerfully stirring life, at least ; and imagination again grew restless. It was, however, still the kind of imagination which had to be interpreted to itself ; it was undirected and formless—the imagination, in a word, of the uneducated. At first sight the interpretation which was given to it appears to be different in kind from that given in the Elizabethan period. It has a more scholarly air. The reform of historical method had begun ; and thus the national vigour found something other than art to enkindle. The vivid characterisation of individuals, the stirring presentation of scenes and episodes, in Macaulay's work, were due, not to poetic genius, but to the gradual firing of a responsive and eloquent mind by the study of documents. Yet it is necessary to observe that, when all such differences have been taken

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into account, the current of new energy ran, after all, into literary channels. There were two reasons for this. One was, of course, that the age of documents had begun. Whatever might be effected for the moment by a great talent like that of Macaulay, the new self-respect of the history schools was bound to draw back from such popular appeals. The other reason was that a fresh form of imaginative art had arisen, and one which was peculiarly fitted to translate into its own terms that rather vague backward turning of the eyes which accompanies brilliant epochs in history. This was the novel, a literary form which is perhaps too little remembered by those who would even yet look for the salvation of historical study in a romantic presentation of its results. Before Macaulay entered upon his *History* Scott had turned to his own purposes the reconstruction of the past, the re-estimation of historical characters, which the passion for original sources had set on foot. He was followed by Bulwer Lytton and others, gleaning in the footsteps of the excavators as well as the transcribers of documents. But it is even more important for our purpose to note that, besides being free, as history was not, to make the most popular kind of appeal to interest in the past, the novel was able also to come into contact with the national imagination at the point of its concern for the present. Dickens,

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Disraeli, and Thackeray were engaged, each according to his own lights, in interpreting the nation to itself, observing and recording the set of the tides of politics and social readjustments, labelling tendencies and movements. Now both these functions of the novel seem to maintain their vigour and their power of appeal. They can be traced through the work of George Meredith to the present day, when writers like Mr. H. G. Wells are expressing through this literary form the sociological problems of the time, and writers like Mr. Maurice Hewlett are using it as the medium for imaginative contact with the life, the common daily habits, the look and the feel of a past time, and even for the vivid personal presentation of its great men.

It cannot be the duty of history to enter into competition with the novel. One reason why Macaulay has never had his deserts as a historian is certainly the prejudice created by his deliberate attempt to compete with the novel. It was not a mere purism which caused the historians to revolt from such an attempt ; there was also the feeling that in their new knowledge, in their new appreciation of the value of documentary evidence and capacity for handling it, they must surely have a source of vitality in their own sphere, and need not look for it in another. Both parties had their success. Macaulay had his partly because his literary gifts must in any

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case have been commanding; but partly also because learning was still in the main the privilege of the minority, and history could only mean to the majority what a man of talent could make it mean. The strict historians had their success for the reason that the new zest produced by the immense unlocking of documentary sources was enough to give vigour even to a purely academic school of history. Macaulay's success was obviously a fleeting one; the very next generation to his own handled him severely; hardly even now has he recovered rank as an historian at all. But in their triumph the purists have hardly observed that there is no quality of permanence in their own success. Fortunately they did become dimly aware of the dangers of one road down which they were travelling; and Lord Acton's pronouncement found them already turned away from the direction of a sterile absolutism.

They do not appear to be altogether aware of another danger which is serious at the present moment. There is a school of thought to-day which virtually denies reality to a study of the past. History, it is said, is not now a science or a branch of learning; it is a method of the mind, almost a method of pedagogy. People who hold this view have passed on logically from the position taken up by John Richard Green, that it was of little or no concern to

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the life of the people at any given time that this or that king waged war, this or that noble plotted and fell. They maintain that it is of little or no concern to the life of the people of our own time whether this or that thing happened at all in any previous period. History as a record of the past, they think, is next door to a useless encumbrance. Our day has to work out its own problems; and though it may occasionally glean an interesting fact or a stimulating parallel from history, its problems have in the long run to be settled on the facts of here and now. Feudalism may have produced certain conditions; Enclosure Acts may have produced others. But in the end the reform of those conditions will depend not at all upon the facts of their origin, but solely on the circumstances to be dealt with at the moment. The true value of history—for some value is still left to it by these extremists—lies in its training of the mind to estimate evidence, balance assertions, and criticise mental attitudes, in its creation of a capacity for judgment.

This school is largely political in origin. But that the same position may be reached from the side of the intellect is seen in such a movement as that of the Futurists. To them history is not only a dead thing; it is a communication of corruption to the living, a kind of mortification. It is allowed to falsify modern values, to

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take the colour and meaning out of modern life, to distort art and labour and society by a perpetual contrast with a wholly fictitious and biassed representation of bygone times.

History is herself largely responsible for such extremes of opinion. By taking her stand on that famous dignity of hers (in this case, as so often, only another name for timidity) she has drawn the fatal line which has led people to believe that her traffic is with something different from the events, the developments, and the aspirations of their own day. From this it is a small step to the belief that their own day can have nothing to gain from history, beyond a certain practice in the use of the mental processes. It is perfectly open to history to retrieve her mistake. England has never taken easily to revolution, and the reduction of history to the position of a method of thought is essentially revolutionary in conception. It has the very tang of 1793 about it.

Yet it is but the reverse side of what historians might make into the most lasting source of vitality that has ever been at the disposal of a branch of learning. The vivifying imagination, which is necessary for all good historical work, comes at this moment, not from any temporary and external provocation of interest in national existence, nor from the direction of literary impulse, but from an influence that must in all

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probability be permanent—a widely spread acquaintance with events and a widely spread intelligence about social conditions. The reason why nothing short of genius in Shakespeare's day, nothing short of a literary gift little less than genius in Macaulay's day, could give history a vital place in the national life, was that the people had but the most limited standpoint of knowledge from which to envisage history. It was to them merely a tale ; and it had to be an interesting tale. But since education and a cheap newspaper press have laid current events under the eyes of every one, and since a growing political intelligence has made social conditions a common concern, the standpoint which formerly was lacking has been provided. That experience of contemporary conditions, upon which in the last resort the sincerity of history must depend, is no longer confined to a portion of the community. It is spread over the whole ; and from the whole the historian may now, if he will, derive inspiration and an enrichment of his work.

It is not surprising that the purist should take alarm at such a position as this. A standpoint, he will reply, is all very well ; but, if history is to be related solely to contemporary conditions, will it not suffer the same influences of sterility that beset it when it was solely related to the central assertions of Christianity ? To begin

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with, there is all the difference in the world between a pivoting of history upon one point in the past, and a weaving of it upon the warp of contemporary conditions. There is, in the latter case, no limit to what may be history, and no moral prejudging of any issue. But, more importantly, to recognise that there is a vast field of interest in history which has been opened by concern for contemporary conditions and fertilised by the imagination provoked by the life of our own time, is not to say that contemporary history must be the centre of the historian's outlook, or attention to it his main duty. It is only to plead that the last of the artificial limitations from which history has suffered should be removed.

The Unity of History has, since Acton's influence took command, been more heard of than the Dignity of History. But if barriers are to be removed from between Christendom and the ancient world, from between this and that nation of the modern world, they cannot be left standing between our own times and some period artificially marked off. Acton himself propounded certain aphorisms, which, though not offered with that intention, are admirably calculated to diminish the difficulties attending the removal of these last barriers. "Keep men and things apart," he said; and again, "Study problems in preference to periods." These phrases might well be the charter of any one who

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wishes to free himself of the dividing lines that part history from to-day. The men, and not the things, are the great stumbling-block in his path ; the problems are at least traceable, while yet the period fails to take shape or outline.

Nor would the abolition of the dividing lines illuminate only the latest period of time. The unity thus consummated would be a real unity ; the past would become one with the present, as the present became one with the past. Imagination in historical research is not static. It may, and very largely does, return, so to speak, upon its own tracks, and bring its stores of fact to bear upon modern conditions. But it may lead into regions of investigation where no end can be predicated. An interest in history roused, for instance, by some notable strike, or some curious wavering of the social fabric, may go no further back than the industrial situation at the end of the eighteenth century ; but it may also go back to the Roman slave system, or to the laws of primitive village communities.

Herein may be found the answer to the purist in historical studies, who would recognise no duty save that of faithfulness to the science he professes. The creation of a true unity in history could never be stultifying. Yet there is surely another duty which he can only refuse at peril of the life of his science. What is the meaning of the wide scope, the almost universal inclusive-

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ness of history to-day, if it is not that men have turned to it with the problems of their existence? That they could so turn at all must in the first place be reckoned to the historian for righteousness. He had seized with enthusiasm the opportunities laid open to him by the age of documentary evidence. Disciplined by philosophy, liberated from the trammels of a dogmatic theology, he had brought to these records a mind balanced as well as trained, open as well as stored. He stood with his hands full of knowledge at the time when, in the conflict of theology with natural science, of the old orderly institutions with a populace that had education but no opportunities, men began to hope that there might be in historical method a formula for much that was at the moment shapeless but obviously vital. It is, therefore, because of all the searching, the effort of the modern world to orientate itself, that history has at present a power which scarcely falls short of commanding the whole field of knowledge. If an historian of a hundred years ago were to return and consider his successors of to-day, he might be puzzled to put his finger, so far as published results are concerned, on any great change, unless it were that he would find it hard to say where the boundaries were drawn between history and various other sciences. Whether that is altogether a happy position for history is a question not yet to be

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answered. It may have its uneasinesses ; for it has been principally brought about by scepticisms of a more or less pronounced kind. Religious beliefs have become matter for history partly because as religious beliefs they had lost ground. Ethics and moral philosophy have become part of history because of the view that they had nothing to teach except the record of the effect of a certain kind of influence upon the human race. Natural science has become part of history because of a revolt against metaphysical speculation, and a determination to feel that the past stages of the development of life have a legitimacy, as subjects of study, which can be denied to future developments.

With its present position thus based upon revolts and scepticisms, what is the security for historical study in the older and narrower sense ? The revolt that may threaten it in its turn has already lifted its head in that school of extremists who would make of history nothing more than a training in method. It is useless to confront this with either literary graces or the lively phrases of the day. What is needed is that fresh and final link in the sense of continuity which can be provided by ceasing to think of history as something that necessarily stops short of our own day. In one aspect history is, indeed, in no danger. Historical scholars there will always be. But the historian has in all ages set before himself the

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belief that his work, above all other activities of the intellect, had a place in the affairs and not alone in the minds of men. To-day, as never before, such a place awaits it. Confused by a perfect din of unsystematised information about himself and his fellow-men, called upon for political decision and judgment, and conscious as his ancestors never were of what such things imply, the ordinary man of to-day hears himself bidden now and again to give himself a little to historical thinking. What can the phrase mean to him while the historians tell him at the same time that his own difficulties and problems are not history, and must be put aside to mature into something other than they are before they become matter for the historian ?

The historian has been wise enough to modify, under the influence of various modes of thought, his conceptions of the range of historical knowledge and the method of research. He is now asked to modify his conception of what history should mean. He can, if he will, maintain his ideal of passionlessness. But he will do so at the cost of being merely bloodless. A set of exercises in judgment for the tyro would be the very perfection of the passionless ; but it would be the ghost of history.



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